

# Spoiled Latvia's Image in the International Arena. The Rights of the Ethnic Russian Minority

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*Latvia is actively preparing for one of the most important political events of the year. Parliamentary elections will take place on October 6, 2018. Submission of the lists of candidates for the 13th Saeima elections will take place very soon – from July 18 to August 7, 2018. But the elections campaign as well as all political life in the country face some problems which require additional attention from the authorities. And these problems spoil the image of Latvia as a democratic state which respects the rights of its people.*

This is a well-known fact, that the image of the state is composed of several components: it heavily depends on its foreign and domestic policy directions. The more so, internal events very often influence its foreign policy and vice versa.

Latvia considers itself a democratic state and tries to prove it by all possible means. But all attempts fail because of a serious unsolved problem – violation of human rights in Latvia.

It is not a secret that about one third of Latvians are ethnic Russians. Their right to speak and be educated in their native language is constantly violated. This problem is in the centre of attention of such international organizations as OSCE and EU. This fact makes Latvian authorities, which conducts anti Russia's policy, extremely nervous.

Thus, the Latvian parliament recently passed in the final reading amendments to the Education Law and the Law on General Education under which schools of ethnic minorities will have to start gradual transition to Latvian-only secondary education in the 2019/2020 academic year. It is planned that, starting from 2021/2022 school year, all general education subjects in high school (grades 10-12) will be taught only in the Latvian language, while children of ethnic minorities will continue learning their native language, literature and subjects related to culture and history in the respective minority language.

Hundreds joined a march in the centre of Riga in June to support Russian-language schools in Latvia. The event was held under the slogan: "For Russian schools, for the right to learn in native language," as the government wants to switch the language of the education system to Latvian.

The European Parliament deputies called for support of Russian education in Latvia. 115 people have signed the joint declaration that will be forwarded to the Latvian Sejm and government. The declaration is signed by representatives of 28 EU countries, and almost all parliamentary factions. Every 7th deputy supported the necessity of the Russian school education in Latvia. The document authors marked that this is unprecedented expression of solidarity towards the national minorities, especially Russian residents of the EU. Authors of the letter sharply criticize the education reform that takes away from children of national

minorities the right to study in their native language.

On the other hand the parliament contradicts itself by rejecting a bill allowing election campaigning only in Latvian.

The matter is in parliamentary election will take part not only Latvians, speaking Lantvian, but Latvians, who speak Russian. Their voices are of great importance either. The authorities had to recognize this and tempered justice with mercy.

After years of oppressing Russian speaking population and violating their rights Saeima committee this month rejected a bill allowing election campaigning only in Latvian.

It turned out that politicians need ethnic Russians to achieve their political goals. They suddenly remembered that Campaigning Law should not promote discrimination because publicly active people should not have problems using the state language.

“Wise” deputies understand that Russian speaking children are not going to participate in the elections while Russian speaking adults can seriously damage political plans. Only this can explain the controversy in the Parliament’s decisions.

In Russia Riga’s decision to shift the medium of learning to the Latvian language for the schools of national minorities is considered as unacceptable and could cause introduction of special economic measures against Latvia as well as condemnation by the international community.

So, Latvia’s on-going war against its residents also could become a reason for deterioration in attitudes not only with Russia but with EU and OSCE that will have unpleasant economic and political and even security consequences for Latvia. It is absolutely clear that making unfriendly steps towards own citizens and neighboring states, Latvia cannot expect a normal attitude in return.

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